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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001817

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR A/S FRAZER, S/E WILLIAMSON, AND AF/SPG  
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON  
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2018

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [UN](#) [AU](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: CONTINUED REPORTS OF REGIME LEADERSHIP  
DELIBERATIONS

REF: KHARTOUM 1777

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: The SPLM leadership continues to report that the NCP is considering replacing President Bashir with a suitable military figure with Islamist credentials, and that Bashir would be content to leave power and live in exile in Saudi Arabia. The SPLM believes that the leading candidate may be Gezira State Governor and former SAF General Abdel Rahman El Khatim, who is considered a moderate voice within the NCP. Vice President Taha traveled to Juba December 17 ostensibly to discuss CPA issues, but some SPLM contacts informed CG Juba that the real purpose of the visit was to discuss NCP regime succession issues with First Vice President and GOSS President Salva Kiir. Political party observers find the scenario laid out by the SPLM to be "very optimistic" and believe that it will be difficult for the NCP to agree on a replacement for President Bashir, and to accept that Bashir will be forced into exile by the ICC. End summary.

12. (C) Following FM Deng Alor's conversation with CDA Fernandez December 13 outlining NCP succession scenarios (reftel), GOSS Undersecretary for Regional Cooperation Cirino Hiteng told polchief on December 16 that the NCP had settled on a candidate to replace President Bashir. He said that former SAF General and current Gezira State Governor Abdel Rahman Al Khatim is considered the leading candidate at the moment because he is close to President Bashir, is one of the last surviving members of the NIF Revolutionary High Command Council that took power in 1989, has not been named by ICC Prosecutor Ocampo in any documents on war crimes in Darfur, and is considered a moderate who would be acceptable to the SPLM and also to leading northern political parties. (Bio Note: Al Khatim is also a former Minister of Defense and Governor of River Nile State. He is married and has several children. End note.) Cirino, who had just met with FM Alor and SPLM D/SG Yasir Arman to discuss this very issue, claimed that Presidential Assistant Nafie Ali Nafie and Vice President Ali Osman Taha had agreed between them that neither would assume the Presidency, and that a senior military figure is needed to lead Sudan through the remaining CPA transitional period until 2011. Cirino also claimed that Saudi Arabia had made an asylum offer to President Bashir during his visit there during the Eid holiday last week.

13. (C) SPLM contacts at the GOSS Presidency informed CG Juba on December 17 that President Taha was in Juba to meet with FVP Kiir to discuss NCP regime succession issues, and to vet candidates with Kiir. The SPLM convened a crisis management team meeting the night of December 17 to discuss the issue and agree on a response regarding preferred candidates. SPLM

contacts told CG Juba on December 18 that although Gezira Governor El Khatim would be a preferred candidate from the SPLM perspective, they now understood (presumably through discussions with VP Taha) that Al Khatim had declined the NCP's offer to assume the GNU Presidency.

¶4. (C) Umma party insider (and daughter of former Prime Minister Sadiq al Mahdi) Miriam al Mahdi told polchief on December 17 that the Umma party is aware that some type of succession discussions as outlined by the SPLM are occurring within the NCP, but said that the NCP has not approached the Umma party to vet any candidates or discuss leadership scenarios in the event that President Bashir is indicted. Al Mahdi said that any succession scenario is "very optimistic," because it would be difficult for many in the NCP to accept that President Bashir would be forced into exile by the ICC - as a matter of national pride - especially given the high profile campaign the regime is currently waging through signs around town and messages on the radio and television that Sudan must not cave in to the ICC. Al Mahdi thought that a military candidate would probably be best but disputed the notion that Nafie and Taha would agree to step aside so easily. She said that the most likely military candidate would be SAF Deputy Chief of Staff General Adad Auf, and that "this would be much worse" than President Bashir due to Auf's well-known hardline tendencies. Al Mahdi said General Al Khatim would be ideal but doubted that the hardliners in the NCP would agree to his selection.

¶5. (C) Comment: The scenario laid out by the SPLM is optimistic and assumes that there will not be a power struggle within the senior ranks of the NCP as to who should

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replace Bashir. There is also no indication yet that the NCP party as a whole is ready to accept that President Bashir be forced into exile by the ICC, if he is indicted. During meetings over the last week, NCP officials have not acknowledged to Embassy officials that succession discussions are occurring, nor would we expect them to. The SPLM clearly hopes that the US might be able to influence the choice of who is selected. Raising this issue with the NCP is extremely delicate and not recommended at this time; however if asked, we could certainly express a preference for a moderate candidate who will follow through on commitments the regime has made, and who would engage seriously on CPA and Darfur issues. Our sense at this point is that while the regime is certainly weighing its options and considering various scenarios, the NCP as a party and the broader regime leadership is probably not quite as far along as the SPLM hopes in planning a clean transition of power in the event of an ICC indictment. Post will continue to make discrete contacts and gather information on possible candidates in the event that President Bashir does step down. End comment.  
ASQUINO